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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 004378

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [FR](#) [IR](#)  
SUBJECT: IRAN/FRANCE: THE RELATIONSHIP "UNRAVELS"

REF: A. (A) PARIS 4358 (NOTAL)  
[1](#)B. (B) PARIS 4535

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Josiah Roxenblatt for reasons 1.4. (b), (d).

[1](#)1. (C) In the course of an October 25 conversation about the recent U.S. decision to designate Iranian entities and individuals for WMD and terrorist activities (reftel), French MFA DAS-equivalent for Iran, Iraq, and the Gulf states Franck Gellet described French/Iranian relations as "unraveling." He went on to say they were at an effective dead point in terms of productive interaction. Whereas France has routinely underscored to us that, despite the ongoing confrontation with the international community over Iran's nuclear program, it maintains a "normal" diplomatic relationship, the Iranians are retaliating over France's tough position. Gellet related that Iranian anger clearly intensified in the wake of FM Kouchner's letter last month to EU foreign ministers urging tougher sanctions. (Comment: Not long afterward, and in the long wake of tough statements by President Sarkozy and FM Kouchner acknowledging the prospect of war should diplomacy fail, the French chargé d'affaires in Tehran was summoned to the MFA to receive a complaint. End summary)

[1](#)2. (C) Nearly all aspects of the bilateral relationship are either frozen or hostage to the ongoing confrontation, according to Gellet. Even technical and cultural exchanges have largely ceased. The Iranians have turned almost all official meetings into harangues about the nuclear issue. Gellet complained that technocrats or non-governmental Iranians on officially sponsored visits are instructed to spout the official line. This has affected banal but to the French important relationships like the one between the Iranian and French national libraries.

[1](#)3. (C) Another phenomenon Gellet noted was the reluctance of French officials at nearly every level, but especially at senior levels, to agree to receive Iranian visitors. He explained that this was partly due to a desire not to be seen publicly shaking the hand of an Iranian at this particular time. Gellet recounted a recent incident in which the president of the French National Assembly refused to be associated in any way with a visit to Strasbourg by his Iranian counterpart. Eventually, something was worked out so that protocol needs were met and the encounter kept out of the public eye. This episode was but one of many, Gellet continued, in which the MFA finds itself with Iranian visitors but doors slammed in their faces. The other recent and somewhat publicized incident occurred when Iranian Vice President Esfandiari Rahim-Mushaei visited Paris to attend a UNESCO meeting in mid-October. Mushaei used the occasion to reiterate publicly Iran's position on development of nuclear energy and criticize France. Even though he holds the inflated title of vice president, Gellet said Mushaei is actually more of a glorified minister of culture. France's minister of culture refused to receive him, and Mushaei had

no official meetings with the French government.

¶4. (C) As the Iranians become more truculent, Gellet stated, the French are less inclined to engage. He said the French presidency maintains a considerable distance from the Iranians. Kouchner wants to retain some measure of contact, especially to discuss Lebanon, but does not have full latitude to do so. (Comment: As reported ref a, Kouchner intends to meet with his Iranian counterpart on the margins of the upcoming Istanbul ministerial in early November, much as they met on the margins of UNGA. Lebanon special envoy Jean-Claude Cousseran, however, has had to cancel the Tehran leg of his upcoming swing through the region. End comment) In Gellet,s view, the GOF still wanted to maintain contact and &channels of communication8 open to Tehran, even though this was becoming increasingly difficult.

¶5. (C) In addition to sanctions-related issues in ref b, Gellet reported that the concern of French business is growing about its holdings in Iran. The French government has urged businesses not to expand their activities, and some are slowly pulling out. This is happening even in the banking sector, where the French remain among the most prominent European players. Gellet said that he receives frequent phone calls from executives of French firms asking whether relations were improving or worsening. France,s antagonistic relationship with Iran has made its business interests vulnerable to competition from other Europeans who not only take a different line but resist French efforts to tighten sanctions.

¶6. (C) We asked Gellet,s opinion about the transition from Larijani to Jalili as the chief Iranian negotiator in talks with the EU on the Iranian nuclear program. Gellet doubted

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there would be any significant change in terms of the Iranian position. Both were hardliners in their own right. The only difference between them was that Larijani ran against Iranian President Ahmadi Nejad while Jalili was close to Ahmadi Nejad.

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